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Rolland Hein. The Harmony Within The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald. Christian University Press/Eerdman's Publishing Co. (Paternoster Press in Britain). 1982. £5.65.

Kathy Triggs

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**Kathy Triggs**

I have frequently found myself in difficulty when I have tried to explain to friends, Christian and non-Christian alike, why I am so keen on George MacDonald. Now, however, my problem is solved. Rolland Hein's book is admirable as an introduction to MacDonald's life and thought. It explains in easy, fluent English how MacDonald's writings have, in spite of great variety of genre and occasional obscurity, an underlying unity, a "harmony within," stemming from his basic principles, his attitude to life, to faith and to God.

After giving a brief biography of MacDonald, Hein takes MacDonald's fantasy works and brings out through detailed study the themes common to all his writings—God's holy love, spiritual evolution, the sacramental character of nature, to name but a few. He stresses the importance of the Bible and Christian tradition to MacDonald: "MacDonald's imagination is biblically oriented, and Scripture, not Freud, is the safer guide to his meaning." Hein includes a chapter on the novels, drawing the student's attention to the more important of these, and concludes with a useful bibliography in which he lists modern reprints as well as the original editions. The photographs are well-chosen to show MacDonald as a whole person, both creative artist and family man, with an interest in his world and his environment.

The book's aim at undergraduate students and non-specialists does create slight drawbacks for the more serious MacDonald student. Although Hein's work in drawing together MacDonald's key themes is scholarly and thorough, it tells the MacDonald *aficionado* little he does not know already. The style, very readable in most cases, is occasionally lax. The sub-headings, which are scattered throughout the book with little literary justification, are a distraction.

It is a pity that MacDonald should need any explanation and interpretation, but in today's post-Christian and (to a certain extent)

post-reading era, it is so. *The Harmony Within* successfully introduces MacDonald's thought and works, and encourages the reader to experience for himself "the thrill of that encounter." **[end of page 36]**